



JOURNEY THROUGH CENTRAL ASIA

Go Beyond | 28 Days | Physical Level 4

Bishkek – Chon-Kemin – Bokonbayevo – Karakol – Almaty – Dushanbe – Khujand – Tashkent –
Samarkand – Bukhara – Khiva – Ashgabat – Mary - Ashgabat

Travel from Bishkek to Ashgabat on this 28 day 'Five Stan' cultural experience. This in-depth tour will see you visiting the Silk Road gems of Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva, the quirky Turkmenistan, colourful markets, fascinating villages and Swiss Alps type scenery. Retrace the footsteps of Marco Polo and Alexander the Great on this unforgettable Central Asian journey.

- Uncover the Silk Road's history
- Witness fascinating eagle hunting
- Browse the colourful bazaars
- Explore the Exotic Khiva
- Discover ancient Samarkand

TOUR MAP

JOURNEY THROUGH CENTRAL ASIA TOUR INCLUSIONS:

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation (3-4 stars, guest house & yurt camp)
- Meals as specified
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English speaking National Escorts (if your group is 10 or more passengers) or Local Guides
- Specialist advice from our experienced travel consultants
- Safe and secure with IATA

The only thing you may have to pay for are personal expenditure e.g. drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, customary tipping, early check in or late check out and other items not specified on the itinerary.

GO BEYOND TOURS:

Venture off the beaten track to explore fascinating destinations away from the tourist trail. You will discover the local culture in depth and see sights rarely witnessed by other travellers. These tours take you away from the comforts of home but will reward you with the experiences of a lifetime.

PHYSICAL LEVEL 4:

All our tours feature a physical rating to help you select the right holiday for you. To travel on any of our tours requires unaided mobility and the ability to stroll around the sights.

‘Journey Through Central Asia’ is rated as a **physical level 4** tour. This itinerary requires a high level of fitness involving hiking and travelling to remote areas where tourist facilities are less developed. This itinerary also drives through areas of high altitude. If you have an existing respiratory, vascular or coronary condition, we recommend checking with your doctor before undertaking this itinerary.

- On some days driving distances are very long and it will take the whole day to reach your destination
- The 2 hikes will generally last around 1-2 hours at a time, sometimes on an incline and mostly on uneven ground
- There will be a few days of walking whilst sightseeing with 5 – 7 hours a day
- In Kyrgyzstan, there will be one night spent in a guest house in Chon-Kemin valley, which will have private facilities.
- In Kyrgyzstan you will stay overnight in a yurt camp near Bokonbayevo, Day 5. Yurts are the traditional home of nomads in Central Asia. They are made from a wooden frame and layers of felt and canvas erected on a wooden platform, with shared bathroom facilities.

Of course, our National Escorts will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary. If you require any more information about the pace of the tours, please contact our reservations team who will be happy to answer your questions.

JOINING YOUR TOUR:

The tour is 28 days in duration including return international flights or 26 days in duration based on ‘Land Only’.

Travellers booked on ‘Land Only’, the price includes your arrival/departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour, or when booking pre and post night accommodation with Wendy Wu Tours.

Join the tour on Day 2 in Bishkek and end the tour on Day 27 in Ashgabat .

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1-2: Fly to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Meals: D

Fly to Bishkek where upon arrival you will be met and transferred to your hotel for check-in. The remainder of the day is at leisure.

Please note: **early check-in is included**. Additional nights' before and after your tour can be arranged. Please contact our Reservations team to book.

**Destination Information**

Bishkek - The capital of Kyrgyzstan has a population of 900,000, and did not develop until 1825, when the Kokand Khanate enclosed the site as a fortress. By 1864, the Russians had captured the fortress and in 1878, founded the city of Bishkek. Bishkek is a city of wide boulevards and marble-facade public buildings combined with numerous Soviet-style apartment blocks. Most streets are flanked on both sides by narrow irrigation channels that water the innumerable trees, which provide shade during the hot summers.

Day 3: Ala-Archa National Park

Meals: B, L,D

This morning, travel one hour to the Ala-Archa National Park, rising from 750m to 2100m above sea level. Take in the clean air and alpine views and explore some of the park's gorges on foot.

Travel one hour back to Bishkek for a comprehensive city tour. You will begin at the Manas Monument, dedicated to the primary national hero of the Kyrgyz people. The journey continues on to the State History Museum, followed by a stroll through Ala-Too Square to witness the Changing of the Guard of Honor ceremony. You will also visit the Independence Monument and Old Parliament Square before a final transfer to Victory Square. Sightseeing in Bishkek will take approximately 3 hours.

**Destination Information**

Ala Archa National Park – Ala-Archa is an alpine national park in the Tian Shan Mountains. The name Ala Archa translates as 'Bright Juniper' from Kyrgyz as the whole gorge is covered with various trees including the main one – juniper.

Ala Too Square – Formerly known as Lenin Square, the square was built in 1984 to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the Soviet Era. Today the square serves as a site for state events. Its main centrepiece is a statue of Manas in celebration of the 20th anniversary of independence.

Day 4: Chon Kemin National Park

Meals: B, L, D

This morning, commence your journey to Chon Kemin. The 150km drive will take approximately 2.5 hours. Along the way, visit the 12th-century Burana Tower, once part of the Balasagun town and citadel. Upon arrival in Chon Kemin, enjoy a quiet lunch surrounded by magnificent mountains and fir forest.

Afterwards, walk through the village, learning about the rural daily life, up into the foothills of the nearby mountains.

**Destination Information**

Burana Tower - This 11th century octagonal monument was once a taller minaret until earthquakes caused significant damage. Today the tower, castle foundations and grave markers are the ruins of the capital of the Karakhanids.

Chon-Kemin Valley – Chon Kemin is a quiet valley with small villages surrounded by magnificent mountains and a fir forest. The spectacular valley is almost 80km deep and is famous for its natural beauty, abundant wildlife and mountain lakes.

Day 5: Tamga Village

Meals: B, L, D

After breakfast, depart for the south shore of Issyk Kul, the world's second-largest mountain lake. The initial 100 km drive to Kochkor village takes approximately 2 hours, passing through the scenic Boom Canyon, the Kuvaky Pass (2,170 m), and the Orto-Tokoy Reservoir.

Upon arrival, visit a local handicraft center to witness a demonstration of traditional Ala-kiyiz and Shyrdak felt carpet making, an integral part of Kyrgyz nomadic heritage.

Afterwards, continue your journey along the southern shore of the lake towards our final destination for the day, Tamga Village.



Please note: Tonight you will overnight in a traditional Yurt Camp with shared toilet and shower facilities.

Destination Information

Kochkor - Kochkor is a large village with a population of 15,000. Most of the inhabitants are farmers and shepherds who live in yurts during the summer. Kochkor used to be a stop for Silk Road merchants travelling to and from Kashgar, on the other side of Torugart Pass in China. The pleasant, leafy town overlooked by snow-capped mountains is a base for excursions into the high country.

Tamga Village – Tamga Village is a cosy and picturesque village on the southern shore of lake Issyk Kul, with green meadows and snow-capped mountains nearby. The surrounding area is sprinkled with yurts. Most people here make a living by either farming or craftsmanship.

Day 6: Eagle Hunting + Karakol

Meals: B, L, D

This morning, drive to Skazka Canyon, or "Fairy Tale" Canyon. Following an easy hike through the canyon, meet a Berkutchi (Golden Eagle hunter) for a private demonstration.

Continue your journey toward Karakol along the southern shore of Issyk Kul, stopping at Barskoon Gorge. Stretch your legs on a light hike to the "Tears of Leopard" waterfall. From here, the final 2-hour drive concludes in Karakol town. Upon arrival, check into your hotel and enjoy free time at your leisure.



Destination Information

Eagle Hunting – See a demonstration of hunting with trained golden eagles, often using a sacrificial rabbit trapped for the purpose. This style depicts authentic hunting traditions: this is often how young eagles are trained. This encounter offers a rare insight into the ancient nomadic tradition of eagle hunting, a practice still preserved by expert hunters in Kyrgyzstan.

Barskoon Gorge – A captivating natural beauty area that includes waterfalls, alpine lakes, and hiking trails. Visitors can explore nomadic culture and enjoy the stunning landscapes of this gorge, that is one of the most beautiful in the area.

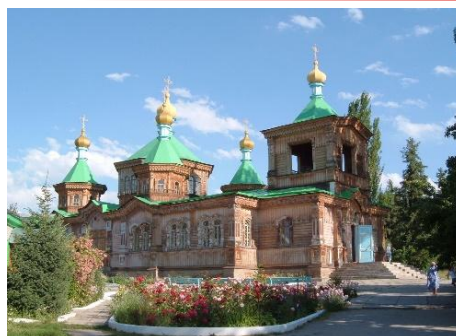
Skazka Canyon - This desert-like landscape, sculpted by millennia of erosion, features vibrant red rock spires and unique formations.

Day 7: Karakol

Meals: B, L, D

Today, begin your day with a city tour of Karakol, starting at the 19th-century Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral. Continue to the Dungan Mosque, an architectural landmark completed in 1910 by Chinese artisans, followed by a visit to the Prjevalskiy Museum, dedicated to the famed explorer of Central Asia.

In the afternoon, depart for Jeti-Oguz Gorge, located 35 km west of Karakol (approx. 45 minutes), where you will enjoy a scenic walk along the river. Return to Karakol to conclude the day with a traditional dinner cooked by a local Dungan family.

**Destination Information**

Przhevalskii Museum - Displays fascinating exhibits on the history of the exploration of Central Asia, Mongolia and Tibet in the 19th century.

Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral - This wooden church was built in 1894 on the ruins of a brick church. It is said that during construction, no nails or metal fastenings were used.

Jeti-Oguz Gorge - A lush valley located 30km outside Karakol. The name translates to 'seven bulls' in the Kyrgyz language, referring to the red sandstone rock formations that resemble seven angry bulls. Famous for its hot springs and the beautiful scenery.

Dungan Family Visit – Over dinner, learn the fascinating story of how and why this Muslim Chinese group immigrated to the region 140 years ago, how they made the area their home, and how they keep their traditional culture and cuisine alive.

Day 8: Kyrgyzstan – Almaty, Kazakhstan

Meals: B, L, D

Rise early this morning to visit the outskirts of town for the famous Karakol Sunday Animal Market.

Please note – The animal market is a traditional working livestock market. Conditions are basic and can be crowded, noisy, and muddy, and animal welfare standards may differ from those expected at home. The visit is optional, and you may choose to remain at the hotel.



Following the market, depart on a 110 km drive (approx. 2–3 hours) to the Kyrgyzstan-Kazakhstan border. Once border formalities are complete and you have crossed over into Kazakhstan, you will be introduced to your new National Escort.

Continue on to the magnificent Charyn Canyon. Spend two hours exploring the Valley of the Castles, where you can hike down to the valley floor or admire the imposing rock formations from the canyon rim. Finally, complete the journey to Almaty and transfer to your hotel.

Destination Information

Sunday Animal Market - Early on Sunday mornings Kyrgyzstan's biggest and most colourful animal markets takes place on the outskirts of Karakol. It is the place to be in Kyrgyzstan if you want to buy or sell farm animals - cows, horses, sheep, and goats are the primary objects of trade.

Charyn Canyon - Over three million years ago, both wind and water sculpted Charyn's red sandstone to form today's fantastical shapes and shadows. Measuring approximately 150 kilometres long and up to 300 metres deep in some areas, the Canyon's River Valley is fed by the local Tian Shan Mountains.

Almaty - Situated beneath snow-capped peaks, and the capital of Kazakhstan until 1997, today Almaty is the country's largest metropolis and is still considered its cultural and trading hub.

Day 9: Almaty

Meals: B, L, D

Embark on a full-day tour of Almaty, starting in the city's historic center. Visit the Park of 28 Panfilov Guardsmen, home to the eternal flame and the Ascension Cathedral, a remarkable wooden structure that survived a major 20th-century earthquake. Continue to the Central State Museum to explore Kazakhstan's history via its 120,000 exhibits, followed by a visit to Republic Square.



In the afternoon, head into the Ili Alatau mountains to visit Medeo, the world's highest Olympic-sized ice rink at 1,690 meters. Continue to Shymbulak Mountain Resort (2,260 m) to enjoy the modern alpine infrastructure. The day concludes at Kok Tobe, a popular hilltop park at 1,100 meters. Take a 10-minute cable car ride to the summit for panoramic views of the city before returning to your hotel. You will be sightseeing today for approximately 6-7 hours.

Destination Information

Zenkov Cathedral - Built between 1904 and 1907 and constructed entirely of wood, the Zenkov Cathedral showcases distinctive colourful hues and is once again a practicing Russian Orthodox Church having been used as a museum previously during the time of the Soviets.

Tian Shan Mountains - The Tian Shan also known as the Tengri Tagh, meaning the Mountains of Heaven or the Heavenly Mountain, is a large system of mountain ranges located in Central Asia. The highest peak in the Tian Shan is Jengish Chokusu located on the Kyrgyzstan–China border, at 7,439 metres.

Day 10: Almaty to Dushanbe, Tajikistan

Meals: B, L, D

You have this morning at leisure before your flight to Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

On arrival, be greeted by your local Tajik guide and transfer to your hotel for some time at leisure.

**Destination Information**

Dushanbe - With Soviet-era pastel buildings and public squares contrasted with the outer hinterlands of mountains and rural villages Dushanbe is one of the most charming capital cities in Central Asia. The name originated from the Tajik word Monday because of a once popular market that would be held each week on that specific day.

Day 11: Dushanbe

Meals: B, L, D

After breakfast, visit the Museum of National Antiquities to explore Tajikistan's diverse Islamic and pre-Islamic history. The museum's centerpiece is the 14-meter "Buddha in Nirvana," a 1,400-year-old statue from the Kushan civilization. Afterwards, enjoy a city tour of the Tajik capital, including strolls through Rudaki Park, the Botanical Gardens, and a visit to the Ismoili Somoni Monument.



In the afternoon, depart on a 23 km drive (approx. 45 minutes) to Hissor Fortress. This historic site showcases the ancient power and culture of the Tajik nation. Explore the 16th-century Medrassah Kuhna, the Museum of Tajik Way of Life, and the nearby 19th-century Medrassah and Mausoleum of Mahdumi Azam before returning to Dushanbe.

Destination Information

Rudaki Park - A scenic landscaped park with flower gardens, fountains and statues. Enjoy the peaceful setting and people watch like with the locals.

Hissor Fort - Fortress of Hissor - As a strategic outpost, the Fortress of Hissor has been destroyed over 20 times throughout history by the likes of Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan and Timur. Each time it has been rebuilt and today there are remnants of architecture that remain mostly from the 18th Century.

Day 12: Dushanbe to Khujand

Meals: B, L, D

This morning travel to Khujand, a journey of approximately 310km (6-7 hours).

En route, stop at the breathtaking Lake Iskander Kul. Surrounded by the jagged peaks of the Fann Mountains, you will have time to explore the lakeshore and take in the alpine views. After your visit, continue the journey to Khujand.

**Destination Information**

Khujand - One of Tajikistan's oldest cities dating back 2,500 years and founded by Alexander the Great as his eastern most settlement. It is the furthest point he reached in Central Asia thus the city was named Alexandria Eschate (Alexandria the Furthest). Known as Leninabad during the USSR occupation it reverted to its original name in 1992.

Day 13: Khujand to Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Meals: B, L, D

Begin the morning with a city tour of Khujand, visiting Pushkin Square, Kamoli Khujandi Square, and Timur Malik's Fortress, which houses the Sugd Museum. You will also explore the Muslihiddin Memorial Complex and the vibrant Panjshanbe Bazaar.

After lunch, depart for the 200 km (4-hour) journey to Tashkent. This includes a drive to the Oibek border to complete Tajik/Uzbek formalities before changing transport and guides for the final 100 km leg into the Uzbek capital. Upon arrival in Tashkent, check into your hotel.

**Destination Information**

Pushkin Square - Named in honour of the great Russian poet and surrounded by neo classical buildings and fountains.

Panjshanbe Bazaar - A colourful and vibrant bazaar, the name of which translates from the Persian word for Thursday.

Tashkent – Tashkent at 3 million people is the capital of Uzbekistan, as well as the most populated city in ex-Soviet Central Asia. Tashkent was influenced by Turkic cultures in its early history, before Islam in the 8th century AD. Genghis Khan destroyed the city in 1219, but the city was rebuilt and profited from the Silk Road. Between the 18th to 19th century, the city became an independent city-state, before being re-conquered by the Khanate of Kokand. In 1865, it fell to the Russian Empire, and became the capital of Russian Turkestan.

Day 14: Tashkent

Meals: B, L, D

In the morning, journey back in time exploring Tashkent's town sights; Barak Khan Madrassah, Kukeldash Madrassah and Tila Shaikh mosque and their archives – known for rare copies of the Koran. Stop at Chorsu Bazaar – the oldest market in Tashkent and enjoy some free time to wander.

In the afternoon you will be invited to the workshop of a famous family of ceramists in Uzbekistan - Akbar and Alisher Rakhimov. Enjoy tea and freshly baked Uzbek pastries whilst learning about their pastime. Your last stop will be to the iconic Tashkent Metro, with its opulently decorated marble, granite and chandeliers.

**Destination Information**

Barak Khan Madrassah - Built in the 16th century with funds donated by the Tashkent ruler Navruz Akhmed. Today this is the oldest educational institution in Tashkent. Though this madrassah is no longer used for its original purpose, it attracts attention for its well-preserved architectural features.

Kukeldash Madrassah - One of the biggest and most famous historical monuments in Tashkent. The 16th-century Islamic school is built of mud bricks decorated with majolica and painted ceramic tiles.

Chorsu Bazaar - Located in the heart of Tashkent's Old City, Chorsu Bazaar is one of Central Asia's oldest markets, having served as a vital trading hub along the Silk Road for over two thousand years. Its massive, blue-tiled dome is a landmark of Soviet Modernism that houses a vibrant sensory experience where vendors sell everything from mounds of colourful spices and fresh flatbread to traditional Uzbek crafts and jewellery.

Independence Square - The main and most beautiful square in the heart of the city. Commemorating the country's freedom, it has been a popular destination for both locals' and tourists because of its beautiful monuments and fountains.

Tashkent Metro – Opened in 1977, the Tashkent Metro was the first subway in Central Asia. Each station is uniquely designed with marble, mosaics, and grand chandeliers to showcase Soviet history, famous poets, and scientific heroes, the most famous of which celebrates the Russian-born cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin.

Day 15: Tashkent to Samarkand

Meals: B, L, D

This morning, depart early for the 330 km drive to Samarkand (approximately 4–5 hours).

Upon arrival and hotel check-in, begin a half-day tour of the city's most iconic landmarks focusing on Registan Square, the central focal point of Samarkand for centuries. You will explore its three magnificent Madrasahs: the 15th-century Ulug-Bek Madrasah, and the 17th-century Tillya-Kori and Sher-Dor Madrasahs.

**Destination Information**

Samarkand - One of the oldest cities in the world and the legendary heart of the Silk Road, it was known to the ancient Greeks as Marakanda. The city was built on the site of ancient Afrosiab, which dates back to the 3rd millennium B.C. According to local history, when Alexander the Great first visited here he declared "I heard that Samarkand was beautiful but never thought that it could be so beautiful and majestic".

The finest builders, craftsmen, philosophers and scientists were invited to Samarkand and the reputation of its refined civilisation grew until Samarkand was a city of legend and wonder along the Silk Road.

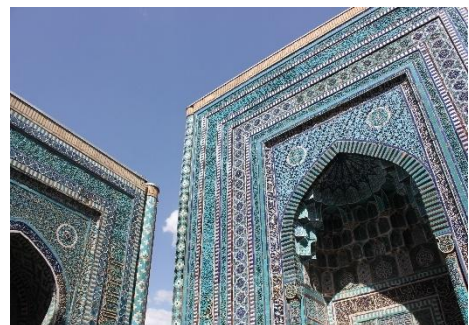
Registan Square - The Square is lined on three sides by sparkling turquoise tiled buildings of the Sher Dor and Tilla Qori madrasahs. These structures represent the pinnacle of Islamic architecture with their intricate azure mosaics and grand proportions. The interior and exterior facades of the madrasahs are decorated with ornamental glazed brick, mosaics and carved marble.

Day 16: Samarkand

Meals: B, L, D

This morning we continue exploring Samarkand to see Gur Emir, the mausoleum of Tamerlane, the grandest structure of Amir Temur's times - the chief Friday Mosque called Bibi-Khanum - the Siab Bazaar and Shahi Zinda Necropolis.

In the afternoon, you will visit Ulugbek's observatory, constructed by Ulugbek (Grandson of the Great Amir Temur) in 1428-1429 before visiting the ancient settlement of Afrosiab.



Destination Information

Bibi-Khanum Mosque - One of the most impressive historic mosques in Central Asia, construction on Bibi-Khanym was started by Timur in 1399 and completed shortly before his death.

Shahi Zinda Necropolis - A mausoleum complex located northeast of the city, the name translates to 'Tomb of the Living King'. This refers to the important Muslim shrine in the region, the complex of quiet rooms around what is most likely the grave of Qusam ibn-Abbas, a cousin of the Prophet Mohammed who is thought to have brought Islam to this area in the 7th century.

Timur's Guri Amir Mausoleum - 15th-century architectural masterpiece in Samarkand, serving as the final resting place of the Turko-Mongol conqueror Tamerlane (Amir Temur). Its name translates to "Tomb of the King," and its brilliant blue fluted dome and intricate interior gold leaf set the standard for later Mughal architecture, including the Taj Mahal.

Ulugbek Observatory - Perched atop the Samarkand hills, Ulugbek's Observatory is a testament to the fact that, in the 15th century, the stars were much closer to Central Asia than anywhere else in the world. Built in the 1420s by the astronomer-king Mirza Ulugbek (the grandson of Tamerlane), it was once the most advanced scientific institution of the Middle Ages.

Afrosiab - This ancient settlement is situated on the spurs of Chupan-Ata hills to the north-east of present-day Samarkand. According to the legend, it was here, on the banks of the river Siab, that the Turanian king and hero Afrosiab, a character of the folk epic 'Shahnama', founded the town that became the capital of Sogdiana.

Day 17: Samarkand to Bukhara via Shakhrisabz

Meals: B, L, D

Approximately 1-hour 30min drive (90km) south of Samarkand is the town of Shakhrisabz; the birthplace of the Great Tamerlane and your destination today. Upon arrival you will explore the city site of the remnants of Ak-Sarai Palace, Dorus Tilavat Cemetery and Kok-Gumbas mosque.

This afternoon you will continue the drive to Bukhara, lasting approximately 4 hours.



Due to safety reasons, buses are not allowed on the mountain pass from Samarkand to Shakhrisabz, therefore you will travel in smaller vehicles for this leg of the journey before travelling by coach again from Shakhrisabz onward.

Destination Information

Shakhrisabz - 90kms from Samarkand, the name of Timur's hometown translated to 'Green City' and was his 2nd capital after Samarkand. The historic centre of Shakhrisabz was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2000.

Ak-Sarai Palace – With its gigantic 65m gate-towers covered with blue, white and gold mosaics, Timur's summer palace is now a Unesco World Heritage Site. The crumbling relic will give you some idea of how Samarkand's buildings would have looked centuries ago.

Dorus Tilavat Cemetery – The memorial complex was formed after the death of the eminent religious leader Shamsiddin Kulal, the spiritual mentor of Timur. His grave immediately became a place of reverence for his numerous disciples. The area was reconstructed numerous times and served as an educational institution.

Kok-Gumbas Mosque – Visible practically from any point of Shakhisabz, the Friday mosque gets its name from this 'Blue Dome' shimmering in the sun. The rich architectural structure was designed and constructed in 1435, 30 years after the death of Amir Timur.

Bukhara - A city which has a long history spanning 2,500 years and what was an integral part of the Persian Empire for centuries. Within the city, there are more than 350 mosques and 100 religious colleges. Bukhara was part of what came to be called the 'Golden Road', the meeting point of the northern and southern branches of the Silk Road, and hence a great centre for commerce, religion and culture.

Day 18: Bukhara

Meals: B, L, D

Today you have a full day exploring the fabulous Bukhara. Sightseeing includes Lab-i-khauz ensemble - modern centre of traditional Uzbekistan, Madrassah Nadirkhon Devanbegi, Khanaga and Mogaki Attari Mosques, Poi Kalon Minaret and Mosque, see Madrassahs Aziz Khan and Ulugbek Madrassah.

After lunch you will visit the Ark of Bukhara, Balakhauz Mosque and the Mausoleums of Ismail Samanid and Chashma Ayub. Lastly, enjoy a stroll through local workshops of block printing, metal chasing, suzani embroidery, carving and gold embroidery.



Women should bring a scarf from home, as you are required to cover your head at some attractions today. Photo fees may be payable at most of the attractions you visit, costing approximately USD\$7 in total.

Destination Information

Ark of Bukhara - The fortified residence of the rulers of Bukhara but also housed palaces, temples, barracks, offices, the mint, warehouses, workshops, stables, an arsenal, a prison and nowadays a museum.

Bolo Hauz Mosque - Translated the name of the mosque means “The Mosque of the Bala Lake”, which refers to the octagonal pool located in the public forecourt lined with stone steps. Built in 1712, the mosque is splendid and still functional – believers still visit to pray every day.

Kalon Minaret - One of the most prominent landmarks of the city, Kalon Minaret was constructed in 1127 by the Karakhanid ruler Arslan Khan. An amazing structure standing at 47m tall, there are 14 ornamental bands and 10m deep foundations.

Ulugbek Madrassah - Built in 1417 as a center for science and astronomy in conservative Bukhara. Its design incorporates astral designs into its decorative facades. The madrassah could seat up to 80 students, with many graduates becoming eminent scholars and poets.

Lyabi-Hauz (or Labi-Hauz) – Lyabi-Hauz is a plaza built in 1620, constructed around a large pool. Derived from Persian and meaning ‘ensemble near the pool’, even today that custom continues as people gather to chat, play dominoes and drink endless pots of tea at the poolside chaykhana.

Day 19: Bukhara

Meals: B, L, D

Continue your sightseeing of Bukhara with an out-of-town excursion to visit the Sitora-i-Mokhikhosa, the summer residence of the former Emir of Bukhara where

Next, visit the Bahauddin Naqshbandi Mausoleum, a famous Sufi spiritual leader of this region in the 14th century. Afterwards, you will have the afternoon at leisure for your own exploration of Bukhara’s streets.



Destination Information

Sitora-i-Mokhikhosa – Dating back to the beginning of the 20th century, the summer residence of the Last Bukharan Emir is situated 4km outside the city. The main building of the palace consists of several reception halls and the emir’s private chambers. The famous white hall, decorated with carved alabaster, resembles the halls of Peterhof Palace in St Petersburg making it a unique mixture of traditional Russian architecture with local oriental traditions.

Day 20: Bukhara to Khiva

Meals: B, L, D

This morning, depart for Khiva on a (approximately 7-8 hour) 470 km journey across the famous Kyzyl-Kum “Red Sand” Desert.

The route includes a stop along the banks of the Amu Darya River, a historic lifeline of Central Asia, offering a chance to take in the views of this major waterway. Continue the drive to Khiva and, upon arrival, check into your hotel for the next two nights.



Please be aware that you will be travelling for around 7-8 hours today. There will be adequate time for toilet breaks and photo stops.

Destination Information

Khiva – This small town may have been founded up to 2,500 years ago and was said to have been discovered by Shem, the son of Noah. The town certainly existed by the 8th Century, as a minor fort and trading post on a Silk Road branch to the Caspian Sea and the Volga River.

Amudarya River - The Amudarya River flows out of the Pamir Mountains, which marks the border between Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. During the reign of Alexander the Great, this river frequently featured in his campaigns, however it was then known as the Oxus River, after its discovery by Herodotus, an ancient Greek geographer.

Day 21: Khiva

Meals: B, L, D

Today, commence a walking tour of Khiva covering the citadel's primary landmarks, including the blue-tiled Kalta Minor Minaret, the Kunya Ark (the Khan's fortress), and the Madrassah Rakhimkhon. You will also visit the Mausoleum of Pakhlavan Makhmud and the Islam Khodja Minaret; climbing the latter offers a panoramic view of the entire town and the surrounding desert.



After lunch, the tour continues to the Juma (Friday) Mosque, famous for its 213 carved wooden pillars, and the Tash-Hauli Palace, where you can explore the ornate living quarters and the harem.

Destination Information

Itchan Kala - A well-persevered example of Muslim architecture in Central Asia at the beginning of the 19th century, Itchan Kala is the inner town of Khiva. The town is surrounded by brick city walls, with four gates at the cardinal points. Khiva's compact citadel, the Itchan Kala, remains largely untouched by modern development and retains the same desert light and atmosphere it held when the city was a major hub along the Silk Road.

Kukhna Ark Fortress - Construction of the fort began in the 12th century, making it one of the oldest buildings in Khiva. There is written evidence that the 'modern' citadel was built in 1668, and the complex grew to hold an arsenal, warehouse, guardhouse, jail, a large kitchen, stable and official offices. Of the buildings that once stood, you can still view the official reception hall, the ornate mint, mosque and a harem.

Tashauli Palace – Meaning “Stone House” this palace contains Khiva’s most sumptuous interior decoration, dense with blue ceramic tiles, carved wooden pillars and elaborate ganch. Completed in 1841, it’s said to have more than 150 rooms off nine courtyards, with high ceilings designed to catch the slightest desert breeze.

Day 22: Khiva to Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

Meals: B, L, D

A long day of traveling today as we journey from Uzbekistan to Turkmenistan, covering approximately 265km. Begin the day travelling 60 km to the Shavat border to complete crossing formalities into Turkmenistan. After meeting your local guide, drive 105 km to Kunya-Urgench, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the former capital of the Khorezmshah Empire.



Explore the city’s medieval monuments, including the 14th-century Mausoleum of Turabek Hanum, the Kutlug Timur Minaret (once the tallest in Central Asia), and the Mausoleum of Sultan Tekesh. You will also visit the Kyrk-Mollah mound, site of the ancient Academy of Sciences, and the 12th-century Mausoleum of Il-Arslan.

After sightseeing, drive 100 km to Dashoguz for your evening flight to Ashgabat, followed by a transfer to your hotel upon arrival.

Destination Information

Kunya-Urgench – Also known as Old Gurganj, this fascinating Old Town contains a series of monuments from the 11th – 16th centuries that testify the outstanding achievements in craftsmanship and architecture of the time.

Turabek Khanum Mausoleum - Whilst there is no knowledge of who is buried inside, this mausoleum is one of the finest examples of Central Asian architecture.

Il-Arslan Mausoleum - The oldest standing monument in Kunya Urgench, this mausoleum is decorated with reliefs from carved terracotta, atop the mausoleum sits a 12-faced conical dome, a unique feature for a building of this kind.

Kutlug Timur Minaret - Originally constructed in the 11th – 12th century and is the tallest minaret in Central Asia.

Ashgabat – Translated in Arabic as ‘city of love’, Ashgabat was rebuilt after an earthquake in 1948 destroyed most of the city. With independence from Russia in the early 1990’s Ashgabat has transformed into a modern city.

Day 23: Ashgabat

Meals: B, L, D

This morning will be at leisure following the previous day’s busy schedule, or for you to get your bearings independently in this wonderful city.

In the afternoon, depart for the Arkadash stud farm near Geok-Depe. At the farm, you will have the opportunity to see and ride the legendary "winged" Akhal-Teke horses.

On the return drive to Ashgabat, stop at Kipchak to visit the family mausoleum of Turkmenistan’s first president and the country’s largest mosque. In the afternoon, explore the National Museum of History and Ethnography, which houses over 327,000 artifacts.



Destination Information

Akhal Tekkes – The national emblem of Turkmenistan and one of the oldest existing horse breeds in the world. One of the most distinct features is the metallic like sheen of their coats.

Day 24: Ashgabat to Mary

Meals: B, L, D

Wake early this morning for your flight to Mary. Upon arrival, drive 25 km east to Ancient Merv, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the most significant archaeological landmarks along the Silk Road.

Following your tour of Ancient Merv, return to Mary to visit the Regional History Museum.



Destination Information

Merv - One of the most important archaeological sites on the old Silk Road, Merv was founded by Cyrus the Great in the 6th century, the “Queen of the World” and was reputedly the largest city in the world. In the 12th century, the city had a population of 700,000 before a Mongol invasion ended her reign in the 13th century when the entire population (including refugees and people from nearby towns) of a million people were killed.

Mary History Museum – Providing a glimpse into the history of this diverse city, this impressive museum showcases archaeological finds from both Ancient Merv and the Bronze Age; dating back to the 3,000BC.

Day 25: Darvaza Crater

Meals: B, L, D

Take the short morning flight back to Ashgabat. Upon arrival, explore the city's modern landmarks, including Independence Park, home to the white-marble Independence Monument, the Ertoghul Ghazi Mosque, and the impressive 10th Anniversary of Independence Fountain, featuring ten sculptural Akhal-Teke horses.



In the afternoon, depart for a 260km (4 hour) drive north into the Karakum Desert to reach the Darvaza Flaming Crater. The final leg involves an 8 km off-road desert drive to reach the rim. While the crater appears modest by day, it transforms into a spectacular "Door to Hell" at night. Enjoy a traditional nomadic dinner prepared over a wood fire under the desert stars before the return drive to Ashgabat, arriving late in the evening.

Important Note – Darvaza Gas Crater

The Darvaza Gas Crater has burned continuously since 1971, but Turkmenistan authorities have been working to extinguish the flame. While it is active at time of writing, the flames may be reduced or extinguished by the time of your visit. The crater and surrounding Karakum Desert remain a spectacular and remote destination regardless, and we will keep you updated if anything changes closer to your departure date.

Destination Information

Monument and Park of Independence – A white-marble “Eiffel Tower”, commemorates the founding of Turkmenistan as an independent nation.

Ertoghul Ghazi Mosque – This prominent landmark in Ashgabat was built to honour Ertoghul Ghazi - the father of Osman I and founder of the Ottoman Empire.

Darvaza Crater - In 1971 the crater was created accidentally due to drilling in the region, which resulted in natural gases being omitted. It was believed that lighting this gas was the safest and quickest option to eradicate the gas and was expected to burn for a few weeks. Over 40 years later it still burns and has been known around the world as the ‘Gates of Hell’.

Day 26: Ashgabat

Meals: B, L, D

In the morning, travel a short distance to the outskirts of Ashgabat to visit the Old Nisa Fortress, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the former royal residence of the Parthian Empire (247 BC–253 AD). After exploring the ruins, return to the capital to experience the vibrant Russian Bazaar.



The afternoon includes a visit to the National Carpet Museum, which houses an extraordinary collection of hand-woven Turkmen carpets and rare textile artifacts, including some of the largest carpets in the world. The remainder of the day is at leisure for personal exploration or relaxation.

Destination Information

Old Nisa Fortress – Residence of the former Parthian Empire from the 3rd century. Formed in an irregular pentagon shape these restored ruins comprise labyrinth walls and fortifications.

Russian Bazaar - Housing an array of foods and souvenir stalls, the bazaar is an ideal way to immerse yourself in everyday Turkmen life.

National Carpet Museum - This museum houses the largest collection of Turkmen handmade carpets dating back to the 18th century.

Day 27-28: Depart Ashgabat

Meals: B

This morning is free at leisure before transferring to the airport for your return flight home.

Any time before your flight is at leisure. You will be transferred from your hotel to the airport, according to the departure time of your international flight.

Late check-out is not included. Additional nights' before and after your tour can be arranged. Please contact our Reservations team to book.



JOURNEY THROUGH CENTRAL ASIA TRAVEL INFORMATION

VISAS:

Visas are not required for New Zealand passport holders for entry into Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan (for stays under 30 days) and Kazakhstan.

Turkmenistan Entry Requirements: Entry visas are required for all foreigners wishing to visit Turkmenistan and are obtained on arrival - Visa on Arrival. A copy of your passport, a portrait photograph and completed visa form are required before departure. Visa and immigration fees paid locally in cash. Wendy Wu Tours Visa Department can assist you with the process.

Please be advised that your passport must have at least six months validity left on it when you arrive back in New Zealand.

Please note the visa procedures and requirements may change at any time. These changes are often made by the relevant embassy or consulate; Wendy Wu Tours acts as a third party and has no influence on the process of a visa. Currently a visa is required for New Zealand Passport holders. Your travel consultant will inform you if any changes are applicable prior to your departure.

IMPORTANT – IMMIGRATION NOTES:

As Central Asian immigration and customs officials are notoriously strict, please make sure you keep all forms for when you exit the country. A lost customs or immigration form could result in a fine.

When entering Uzbekistan, you will need to complete a foreign currency declaration form when you arrive and keep a copy yourself. Failure to do so accurately or to exit the country with more currency than when you entered may result in delays, fines or additional sums being confiscated.

Ensure you exchange any unspent local currency prior to departure as there is not generally exchange offices at international airports in Dushanbe and Bishkek.

Several medications containing tramadol, morphine, opiates or any other similar constituent component are banned in Turkmenistan and are considered narcotic drugs. Do not bring any medications containing these drugs into the country.

Some medications available over the counter or by prescription in other countries, such as sleeping tablets, may be illegal or restricted in Uzbekistan. You should declare all prescription medications and other restricted items on arrival in Uzbekistan and carry a copy of the prescription with you.

INSURANCE:

We strongly recommend that you take out a policy as soon as you pay your deposit. Wendy Wu Tours cannot in any way be made liable for any additional cost incurred by the customer on any tour due to the customer not having adequate travel insurance.

We also encourage all customers to take a copy of their travel insurance documents (especially relevant international contact numbers) with them while on tour. We advise that you check the inclusions and procedures for lodging claims prior to your departure. These documents should be stored separately from the original.

ACCOMMODATION:

Your accommodation has been selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a standard hotel in one city to a family run guesthouse in a smaller town. In remote areas, accommodation may be of a lower standard and may not have all western amenities. Hotels are generally rated as local three to four star standards, please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality do exist between New Zealand and Central Asia.

You will be travelling through rarely visited and undeveloped areas of eastern Kyrgyzstan for a few days. This is a remote area with villages, nomadic settlements, very small towns and little in the way of tourist facilities.

Types of accommodation you may encounter on this tour include:

Yurts: Yurts are the traditional home of nomads in Central Asia. They are made from a wooden frame and layers of felt and canvas erected on a wooden platform. The interior is filled with warm fabrics as well as ornate wooden furniture. Nomads in Kyrgyzstan live in yurts in the months around summer. Staying in a yurt will allow you to experience the unique and intrinsic aspect of local life in Kyrgyzstan. Although they are not luxurious, they do offer comfortable accommodation in remote regions of the country.

Guesthouse: These provide basic yet comfortable rooms in a small guesthouse. Every couple/single person will have their own room, with private western facilities. Breakfast and dinner is served in the restaurant.

Three and four star hotels: You will be staying in hotels of three and four star standards for the remainder of the tour.

EATING IN CENTRAL ASIA:

Central Asian cuisine is diverse and flavoursome with a legacy stretching back thousands of years. It is important to keep an open mind and be adventurous. All meals (excluding drinks) are included in our fully inclusive Journey Through Central Asia group tours from the groups' arrival until the groups' day of departure. Please be aware that dishes selected for your meals reflect the cooking styles and signature dishes of the local area you are in.

In Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the cuisine is influenced by Middle Eastern and Turkic (or Mediterranean) dishes – yoghurts, dried fruit, legumes, fruit vinegars, or mild spices like cumin season the common dishes such as lagman (handmade noodles), shashlyk (kebabs), naan (flat bread) and plov (rice pilaf dish). Mutton and chicken are the only meats available in most areas and feature in most dishes. Local breakfast dishes include naan and airan (like sour cream), savoury noodles with vinegar and green tea. You may also be served a fried egg, jam, honey or toast. Black tea and coffee can usually be requested. Fresh cow's milk is not generally available.

Vegetarian only alternatives are not usually available in Kyrgyzstan, though Uzbekistani restaurants are more flexible. There are always plenty of salads, vegetables and bread offered at most meals. In remote areas, lunch may be prepared as 'picnic style' by the hotel that morning, or your guides may organise a simple meal at a local restaurant. Lunch is the main meal of the day, with dinner usually a lighter version of lunch. If you have any food allergies or any other preferences, please make them known to your guide/s at the start of your trip; they will do their best to ensure that your requirements are met, however, 'no guarantees can be made'. Long driving distances, road conditions or flight times may delay or alter your meal times, which could mean a dedicated meal is replaced by those supplied on the aircraft.

Despite the Muslim culture, drinking alcohol is acceptable and expected in this ex-Soviet region, Kyrgyzstan more so than Uzbekistan. Expect to be offered vodka (not included in your tour price) at every meal! The most popular mealtime drink is Chay (green tea) and is available at most meals, usually straight a large block of sugar crystal may be added to the pot, or even your glass. Black tea and coffee are not always served, however can usually be requested.

If you like, you can bring some supplements with you from home. Tea/coffee bags, instant soups or noodles, biscuits, energy bars, milk powder sachets, are all a good idea – consider your luggage weight though! There are numerous small supermarkets and shops in every town and village along the way where you can buy odd items e.g. instant noodles, muesli and chocolate bars, biscuits, drinks, chips, cakes and sweets.

DEVELOPMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA:

Although Central Asia is developing quickly, it still lacks the international standards of civil infrastructure and tourist facilities. Concepts of personal responsibility are also different to those in New Zealand. Consequently, tourist and public facilities may not uphold the same safety standards as in New Zealand; for example, you may see a hole in the road without a warning sign or safety barricade. All our suppliers meet local safety standards as a minimum. We want you to have an enjoyable holiday, so we ask that you take extra care, use your common sense, refer to notices and follow advice from your National Escort/Local Guides.

The former Soviet countries in Central Asia were isolated and less developed by western standards for decades and all levels of infrastructure remain affected today in some way. In the tourism sector, newly built and very good hotels may still have poorly trained staff with an abrupt manner, roads can be in poor condition and officials can be corrupt. The level of English spoken outside of hotels is minimal (except for the children) and the Cyrillic alphabet is used instead of the Latin one (though this is slowly changing in Uzbekistan), so you will find your guides indispensable.

We have found that those customers who embark with a sense of humour and adventure, who accept that things can and sometimes do go wrong, are those who find their experience most rewarding.

Journey Through Central Asia is one of our most unique and adventurous group tours, tracing the ancient Silk Road, including the fabled city of Samarkand. We wish for you to embark on your journey through Central Asia with a level of tolerance and understanding. This region is remote, and conditions are not as developed as they are at home.

It is essential that all customers recognise the demands of factors such as basic facilities, travelling at altitude, travelling long distances and cultural differences. The rewards of seeing and experiencing these lands, so different from your own, are immeasurable and can only be enhanced by an adventurous spirit.

SOUVENIRS:

We want to be able to give you an opportunity to buy souvenirs so we include some stops at museums or exhibitions that demonstrates a craft or product unique to that region with pieces available to buy. We understand that souvenir hunting is not for everyone so we aim to take you to places that hold local interest. We trust you will enjoy these opportunities to learn about local arts and crafts and understand their historical and cultural importance

TIPPING POLICY:

Local tipping is customary in Asia. However, this can often lead to awkwardness in knowing when it is appropriate to tip and how much, as well as ensuring you have a suitable amount of change available at the time. For your convenience, with years of experiences in providing the best customer service, Wendy Wu Tours operates a kitty system on our Group Tours so your National Escort will look after this aspect of your trip for you. It also ensures that the amounts paid are reasonable for you but still fair for the local people.

Please refer to our website or invoice for tipping amounts.

TRANSPORT:

Coaches: Coaches with air conditioning are used on our group tours for city sightseeing, short excursions to the countryside and longer transfers where necessary. It may not always be possible to return to your hotel after sightseeing to freshen up before going to the restaurant for dinner due to long travelling days. Roads in generally been improved over recent years, but traffic, weather conditions and terrain may extend driving times. Road construction work usually covers an enormous section of road - not just one or two kilometres as you may be used to. For this reason, the timings listed in the sections above are approximations only.

PACKING LIST AND CLIMATE:

Most of your touring in Kyrgyzstan is at an altitude between 2,500 and 3,300 metres above sea level so temperatures can get low during the day and very cold overnight between May and late September. Please ensure you have adequate warm clothing, including something warm to sleep in during our yurt stays.

Temperatures for most of your time spent in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Almaty and Dushanbe will range from 23c to 35c between May and late September.

Modest clothing such as long lightweight pants and shirts that cover your shoulders for men and women is highly recommended. Headscarves for ladies are required for visits to mosques and madrassas throughout Central Asia. Women should bring a scarf from home, as you are required to cover your head at some attractions.

Seasonal weather patterns can be quite unpredictable. Up to the minute information on worldwide weather can be found on www.weather.com

VACCINATIONS AND YOUR HEALTH:

Wendy Wu does not give specific health advice, but we do recommend you see your doctor at least six weeks prior to travel for advice and to allow time for any necessary vaccinations. Please remember to take your itinerary with you. Safetravel has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful www.safetravel.govt.nz

BEFORE YOU LEAVE:

We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with www.safetravel.govt.nz as in the event of an emergency, New Zealand Consular assistance will be more readily available.

Up until the day you travel, it is vital you keep up to date and familiarised with the entry requirements as these can change at short notice. You are personally responsible for completing any entry forms, conducting any covid tests (if necessary), etc and adhering to countries' specific entry requirements.

You can also access the New Zealand Government's travel advisory service for up-to-date information about your destination on the same website.

ITINERARY CHANGES:

It is our intention is to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours or as local conditions dictate; in these circumstances we will make the best possible arrangements whilst maintaining the integrity of your trip.

AFTER YOUR BOOKING:

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive an email with your confirmation invoice, along with a link to our website where you can find your visa information (if applicable) and other important information. Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2 weeks prior to departure.

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